



Crafting a Corset

Written By: Alaina Zulli



TOOLS:

- [Awl \(1\)](#)
- [Eyelet tool \(1\)](#)
- [Grommet setter \(1\)](#)
- [Hammer \(1\)](#)
- [Needlenose pliers \(1\)](#)
- [Ruler \(1\)](#)
- [Scissors \(1\)](#)
- [Sewing machine \(1\)](#)
- [Sewing pins \(1\)](#)
- [Wire cutters \(1\)](#)



PARTS:

- [Decorative outer fabric \(1 yard\)](#)
- [Lining fabric \(1 yard\)](#)
- [Thread \(1\)](#)
- [Busk \(1\)](#)
- [Boning \(10-meter roll\)](#)
[aka white boning. Alternatively, you can purchase pre-cut boning, but I find this annoying since you have to wait till the corset is assembled in order to measure for the correct lengths. The 10-meter roll will be more boning than you need, but boning never goes to waste in the end!](#)
- [Boning tips \(3 dozen\)](#)
[The 10-meter roll of spring steel comes with a half gross of boning tips, which will be more than enough for this project.](#)
- [Bone casing tape \(7 meters\)](#)
[this can also be purchased by the roll.](#)
- [Grosgrain ribbon \(1 yard, 1" wide\)](#)
- [Corset lacing \(2 meters\)](#)

SUMMARY

Corset-making may seem like a job only for the professionals, but anyone who can sew a straight line on the sewing machine can do this project.

Corsets require more materials than the average sewing project, so I recommend getting all

your shopping done in one go. [Farthingales](#) has everything you'll need, plus a great selection of fabric and patterns.

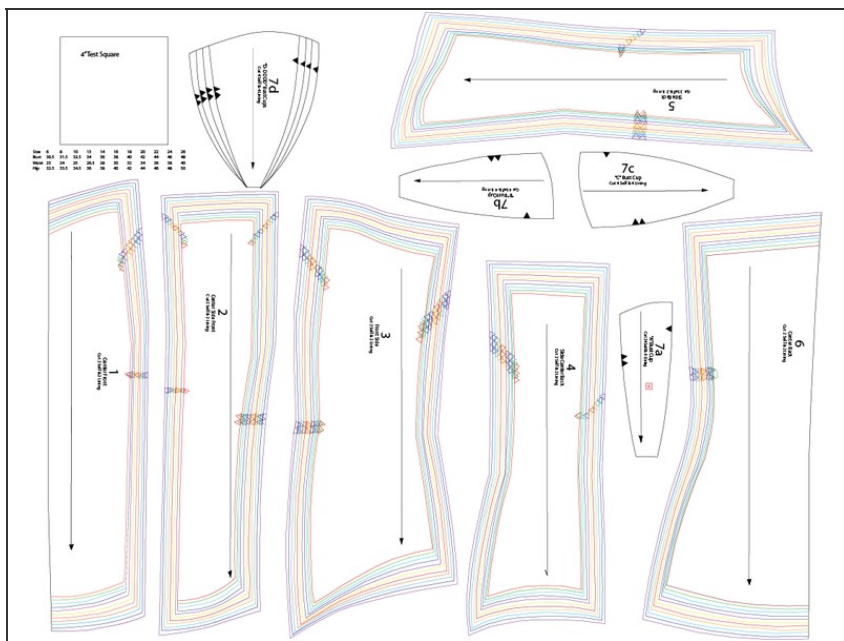
You can use any crisp woven fabric for the decorative ("self") outer layer. I am using a white damask cotton blend for the demonstration, but taffeta, satin, crepe-backed satin, duppioni, brocade, jacquard, or twill would also work. The inner ("lining") layer should be a firmly woven cotton or cotton blend. Coutil is the traditional material for corsets, but canvas, duck, or twill are also fine.

Step 1 — Gather materials and tools.



- Collect all the materials listed above, and organize the tools you need.
- Clear your workspace.

Step 2 — Print, assemble, and cut the pattern.



- The sizes range from 6 to 26. To determine your size, take your bust measurement (over a normal, non-push-up bra), waist (approximately 2" above the navel), and hip (approximately 8" below the waist).
- The pattern allows for about 2" of ease (also known as "spring") at the back, so don't freak out if when you measure the pattern it seems small. If you are between sizes, round down to the smaller size. If you want to be able to lace tighter, use a smaller waist size and blend the cutting lines.

Step 3 — Prepare the fabric.



- Cutting on the grain is particularly important in making corsets. Make sure the threads of both your decorative and lining fabrics are perpendicular by stretching and blocking them.
- To block, pull the fabric on the bias in both directions. This will loosen the threads and help them to realign themselves. Then iron, pushing the iron along the grain line and the cross-grain. When you fold the fabric in half there should be no distortion and the edges should match.
- Lay out your pattern with the grain line following the direction with the most amount of stretch. For most fabrics, this will be on the cross-grain, opposite from how you would cut most patterns. You want the least amount of stretch in the direction of the fabric encircling your waist. Historically, corsets were sometimes cut on the bias to mold to the body, but for this style of corset you will want as little stretch around the body as possible.

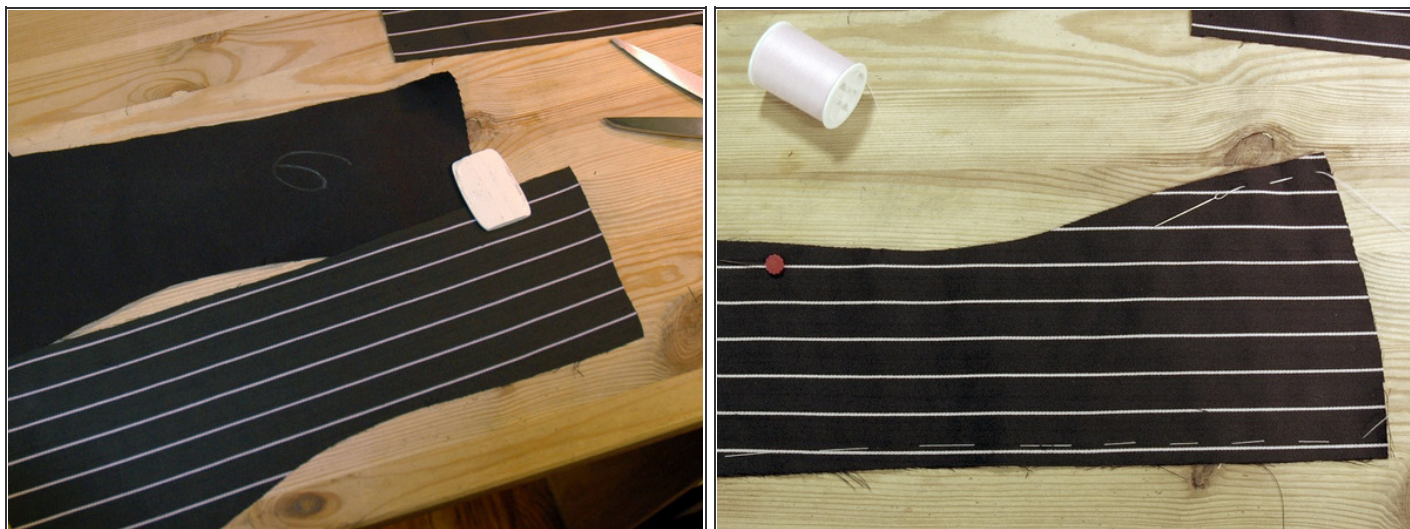
Step 4 — Lay out the pattern.



- To make sure each piece is properly aligned, measure from the grain line to the edge of the fabric. I know that it is tempting to skip this step. Don't! If ever there were a time to be a perfectionist, this is it.
- Pin the pieces on the fabric. Alternatively, weight the pieces with stones or pattern weights and trace the cutting lines with chalk. I prefer the latter method because there is less distortion while cutting.
- Cut the pieces very precisely. Remember that if you cut just 1/16" larger on each seam, your corset will end up about 1.5" bigger.
- In addition to the pieces in the pattern given in Part 1, you will need 2 back-facing pieces, 3"x16", in both self and lining, and 2 front-facing pieces, about 2"x16".
- If your self fabric is fairly stable you can use only self for the front facing. If it threatens to fray under stress, cut pieces of lining to stabilize it.



Step 5 — Baste and press.



- I like to mark my pieces in tailor's wax with their piece number to keep track of which side is the wrong side. Hand-baste each self piece to the corresponding lining piece. You'll be tempted to skip this step, but I assure you it is crucial! This is called flat-lining. In this case, the purpose of the lining is to support the decorative outer fabric and reduce wear, not to hide seam allowances as with most ready-to-wear.
- Baste with long (.5"-.75") stitches along the long sides from bottom to top. Don't baste the bottom and top edges, because your 2 layers will shift during sewing and you will end up with bubbles.
- Press from the center of each piece, taking care not to slide the iron. You'll notice that any sliding will cause ripples in the layers, so just press straight down. The pressing is an important step. I can't explain why (static? the heat makes the fibers mesh together?) but it will help you keep everything together when you assemble the pieces.

Step 6 — Assemble the pieces.



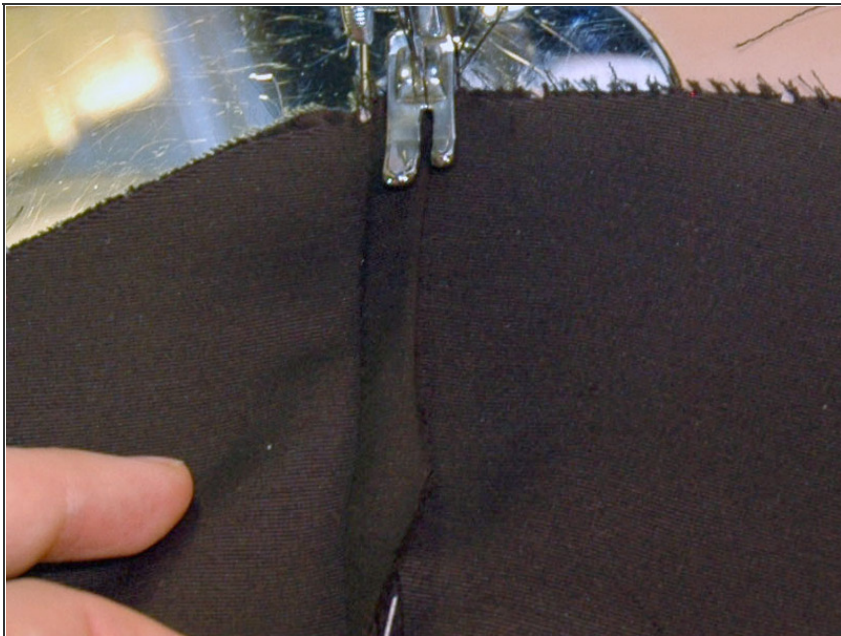
- With your clear plastic ruler and chalk, mark the sewing lines on the tips of the gores.
- Lay out your pieces in order of assembly. This will prevent sewing the wrong ones together, which is easy to do with so many fiddly little pieces.
- Sew together the corset using 5/8" seams (see Step 4 for seam variation). Match the notches, and stitch from top to bottom. There may be some small amount of distortion as you sew, so don't worry too much if the top and bottom edges don't line up exactly. You'll trim that later. However, if your pieces are mismatched by more than about 1/4", you'll know something is wrong!

Step 7 — Press and trim.



- Press all of the seam allowances towards the back. At the tip of the gores, you'll need to clip one side of the seam allowance so that it can lie flat.
- Trim the bottom 3 layers of each seam to about 1/4". I'm using applique scissors, which are great because their bottom blade doesn't catch on the fabric.

Step 8 — Flat-fell.



- Technically, flat-felling is done on the right side of the garment, as on a pair of jeans. You can do it this way if you want extra seam definition in your corset. You'll have to assemble the garment (Step 2) wrong-sides-together.
- I do my flat-felling inside. To flat-fell, finger-press the top seam allowance under, and topstitch along the edge. If you want even more seam definition (and strength), topstitch 1/16" from the seam. From the outside, this will give you the impression of channels running approximately 3/16" wide.
- Flat-fell all of the body seams first, and do the gores last.

Step 9 — Attach the waist ribbon.



- Cut 2 lengths of grosgrain ribbon. To determine the length of each, take your desired waist size, add 2" for the seam allowance, and divide by 2.
- To find the waist of your corset, pull your corset until you find the line of most tension. The waist ribbon will be slightly tilted, not directly perpendicular to the grain.
- Machine-baste the ribbon at the center front and center back. Make sure the ribbon matches evenly on both sides of the corset.
- Hand-baste along the length of the ribbon to hold it in place while you sew the boning channels later on.

Step 10 — Sew the back facing.



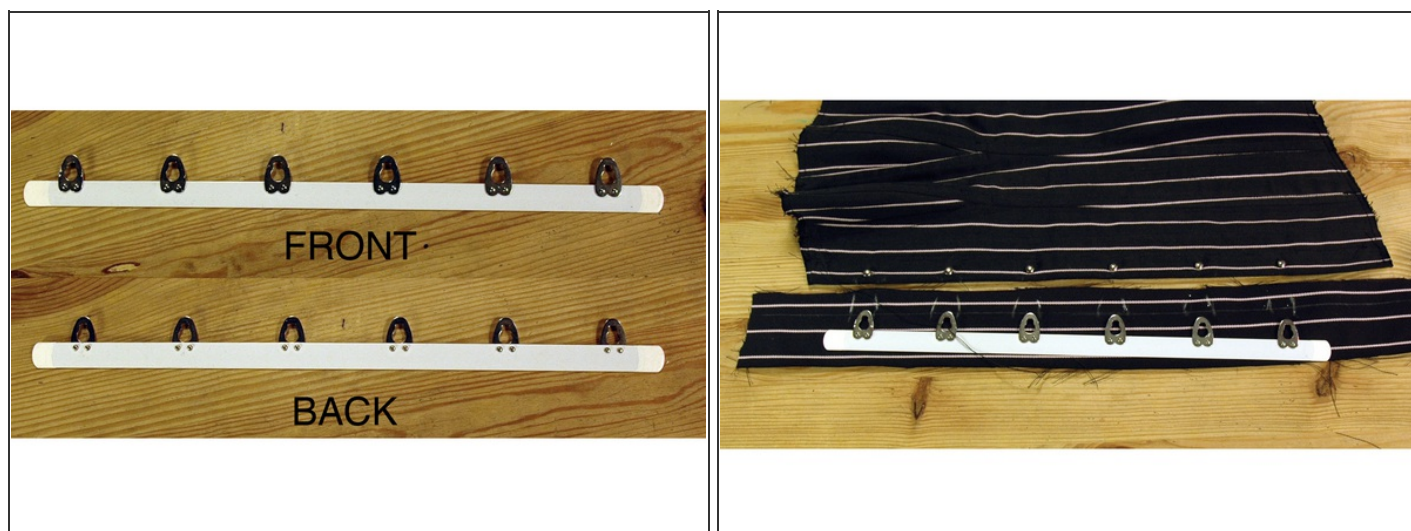
- Each back facing will hold a bone along the back edge, a row of grommets for lacing, and another bone for sturdiness.
- Sew the back facing to the corset with a 5/8" seam. Press open, and then press the facing in, making sure the edge is crisp. Topstitch 1/6" from the back edge.
- To form the first boning channel, sew 3/8" from the topstitching. It is very important that you never sew less than a 1/4" channel, or your bone will not fit. If you must err, err on the side of more room. However, don't overestimate, since you don't want your bones sliding all around. I like to mark my stitching line with chalk.
- Sew another line 5/8" from the last stitching line, to form the grommet channel. Finally, trim the facing about 1" from the last stitching line. Turn the raw edge under, and sew your last stitching line to form a channel 3/8" wide.

Step 11 — Sew the boning channels.

- I sew one channel in the center of each piece, plus one alongside the busk. Corsetiers have all manner of boning techniques, bending them precisely around the body to ensure greatest fit, but I find straight up-and-down boning sufficient for this style corset.
- I recommend using bone casing tape. It's inexpensive and easy to use. If you're feeling thrifty and DIY, you can use 1" strips of your lining fabric.
- Make sure your boning channels are more or less 3/8" wide. More is better than less, but try not to deviate too far.
- On this corset, I have turned under the bottom of each boning casing at each of the 3 back pieces. There is no need for stiffening over the flesh of the buttocks. If your derriere is significantly larger than your hip, extend the boning casings to the end to keep the corset straight. I extended the front casings to the edge so that the corset would not fold up in wearing.



Step 12 — Insert the right (eye) side of the busk.



- Pin or hand-baste the facing to the right side of the corset front. Using your clear plastic ruler, draw your stitching line in chalk $\frac{5}{8}$ " from edge. Position the right side of your busk (the eye/loop side) about $\frac{3}{4}$ " from the top edge. The bottom of the corset will extend several inches past your busk. This is fine -- you can add hooks and eyes at the end if you want.
- Mark off in chalk on either side of each eye. Sew from the top, skipping the areas that the eyes will go through. Make a couple of backstitches at the open and close of each gap.
- Using your zipper foot, sew the facing on as close to the edge of the busk as possible. Sometimes I hand-baste first if the fabric is slippery.
- Trim the facing to about 1", and finger-press under. Sew a boning channel a scant $\frac{3}{8}$ " wide.

Step 13 — Insert the left (knob) side of the busk.



- On the left corset half, sew the front facing to the center front edge in a 5/8" seam. Press the seam open, then press the facing in.
- You'll notice that the knobs are closer to one edge than the other. The closer edge should be at center front.
- You'll notice that the knobs are closer to one edge than the other. The closer edge should be at center front.
- Using an awl, push a hole through the top layers of the left side (all layers except for the facing and facing seam allowance). Work the awl around a little to loosen the yarns. Don't cut the threads! This will weaken the area and make ripping during use more likely.
- Push the first knob through the hole. I use my awl to gently work the threads over and around the head of the knob. I usually have to work the hole open a few times to get it wide enough to go around the knob.
- If you absolutely can't get the knob through, try going only through the fabric and lining, not the seam allowances. Repeat for all the knobs.
- Using a zipper foot, sew the facing as close to the busk as possible. I prefer to sew from the right side, to

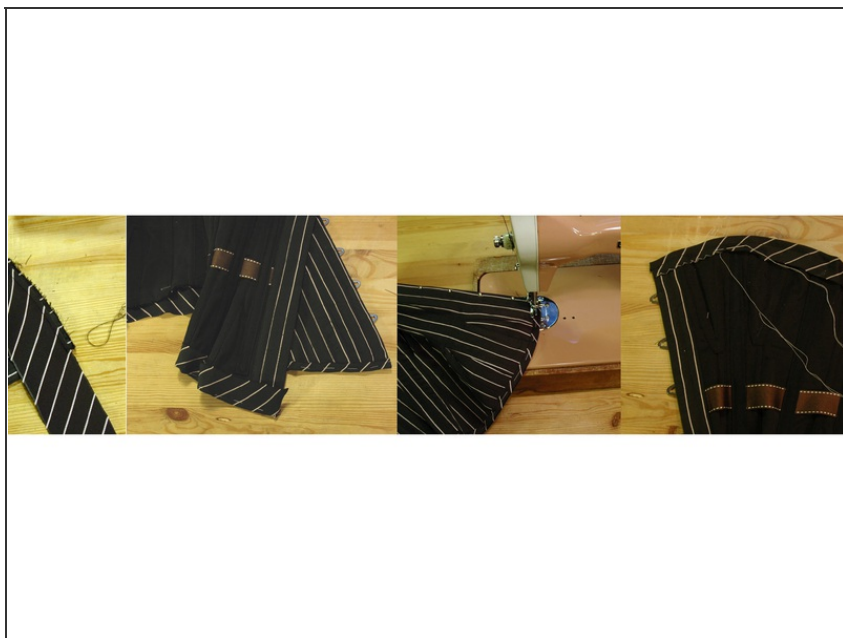
avoid getting the knobs stuck in the needle plate. Sometimes I baste it by hand to keep all the layers in line.

Step 14 — Insert the bones.



- If you're buying your boning pre-cut, this is the step where you measure the length of each channel (remember to subtract a generous 5/8" from both the top and the bottom for the seam allowance). If you bought a coil of boning and are cutting your own, read on.
- I cut, tip, and insert each bone separately. This probably takes more time than if I did it all in a batch, but I find it easiest this way because it is so easy to get the bones mixed up.
- To cut, find the correct length by laying the boning on the channel, taking care to not extend the boning into the seam allowance. At the same time, you don't want the boning to be too short, because too little vertical support could lead to wrinkling. Therefore, try to be precise in your measurement.
- Cut the bones with wire cutters. I usually find mere strength and metal insufficient, so I bend the boning back and forth to break it off. I find that the slightly jagged edge helps to anchor the boning tip.
- Attach a tip to each end of each bone. Farthingales has their own set of instructions, and they are good. However, I find the two sets of pliers unnecessary and usually just chew around the tip until it sticks. If I'm really desperate I use glue. Tipping bones takes some practice, so don't despair if the first dozen don't stick on. That's why I had you purchase extra tips.
- If you haven't already, sew a stay-stitch along the bottom edges of your corset.
- Insert the bones. Sew a stay-stitch along the top edge, taking great care not to break your needle when you come near the bones. I often sew this with my zipper foot.

Step 15 — Bind the edges.



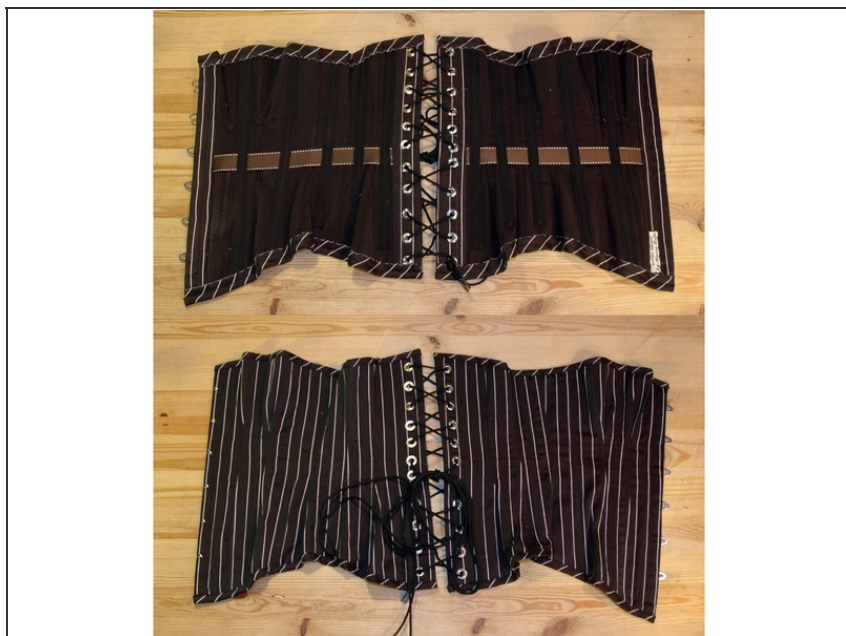
- Bind the top and bottom edges of the corset. Usually I cut bias strips from the self-fabric 2" wide. You can also use a matching bias tape, piping, or whatever takes your fancy.
- To attach the bias strips, I usually sew them in a 3/8" seam right-side to right-side, turn under, and whip to the inside by hand. For Becky's corset, I stitched the bias down from the front side (called stitch-in-the-ditch). Then I did a catch-stitch over the raw edge inside in pink thread, which I think gives a beautiful hand-made finish.

Step 16 — Insert the grommets.



- Plan your grommet placement so that the top and bottom sets are near the edging. Space the grommets so that they are about 1"-1.5" apart. The spacing will differ according to the exact length of your finished corset.
- I always try to make a set of grommets at the waist slightly closer together to designate where to position the lacing. This will make more sense in Step 6.

Step 17 — Lace your corset.



- You'll need approximately 5 yards of lacing. Ribbon and twill have historically been used for lacing, but I find that they do not hold up as well as flat lacing or cable cord.
- Have you ever spent your gym period picking apart that plastic bit on the end of your sneaker lacing? You can finish your corset laces with the very same stuff. Farthingales sells it by the foot. To apply, sew around the ends of your lacing, and then thread through the tubing. Hold the tube over a flame until it melts slightly into the lacing.
- To lace your corset, start at the top and lace in criss-crosses down to the waist. At the waist, lace two at the outside. You can see this best in the illustration. The point is to get the lacing at the waistline, so that when you pull, the most tension is at the waist.

Step 18 — Try it on!



- You will have probably already tried it on, but if you haven't, now is the time! The top of the corset should be just past the nipple. The bottom will extend over your hips, but shouldn't ride up and cause horizontal wrinkles.
- Pull the corset from the loops formed at the waist. Traditionally, corsets were often tied in front, but you can choose to tie yours in front or back according to style.

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